/35 cont./

776 [774] affected man in his infant stage; no wonder the Abkhaz personifies and deifies all these, together with trees, woods, fields, etc.; he deifies some things because they bring him help, others because they do him harm. Accordingly, Abkhaz mythology created special protective deities for every activity /37/ of man, whether agriculture, industry, art, or herding. Some of these are, for instance: Aithar, the protector of cattle; Dzhadzha, god of sowing; Shasha, god of the smithy, and others. Many of these deities are female; for instance, the protector of the element of water, "mother of the water," is a woman; the earth itself is personified as a woman; there is also a "lady-wind"; the ancestor of cattle is female, as is the ancestor of nanny-goats; the god of sowing, Dzhadzha, and others are also female.

777 776 [774] Besides these deities, there are the Ashatsa-chaphatsa, the "creator" and "forger" gods. There are either two of them, or many. Under the influence of Christianity, they are presented in the form of angels. "Every soul" is born through Ashatsa-chaphatsa. They determine the future of the newborn child, his happiness and unhappiness, the length of his life and the hour of his death, and they make an inscription on his forehead (lakhints'ara /see foreign text/) concerning all this. The Abkhaz is certain that these inscriptions on the forehead exist and believes that anyone can confirm it with his own eyes. Incidentally, let us tell an Abkhaz tale that illustrates the inevitability of predestination or fate.

777 776 539 In the night two men set out to steal. On the way they were caught in a heavy rainstorm. They took refuge under the porch of a peasant's hut. Peeping in, they saw a group of women gathered, among them a woman in labor, who shortly afterwards gave birth to a girl. The "creators" and "forgers" did not hesitate to appear. One of them said, "The newborn girl shall become the wife of one of the thieves outside that are looking in. This shall be his fate." The second of the "creators" and "forgers" confirmed the words of the first. The thief, already middle-aged, said on hearing this, "I am not young even now, and she has just

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777 been born; God save me from such a marriage." And so he
776 planned to kill the newborn baby; when everyone in the
539 house had fallen asleep, he slipped quietly in, carried the child out, ripped open her belly, and threw it upon the flat roof of the hut. Then the two thieves went on their way. The child's wailing awakened the women, who found her, sewed up the wound with silk thread, and thus saved her from death. And no matter how hard the thief about whom the above-mentioned prophecy was made tried to find a wife, he was /38/ unsuccessful. Meanwhile the girl who he thought was dead reached marriageable age and one day somehow met the thief. He immediately fell in love with her and married her. Then it was shown how inevitably every predestination and decision made by the "creator-forgers" is fulfilled.

VII.

Prayers in Honor of the Deities

782 Prayer is the name given to those religious ceremonies and rites accompanied by sacrifices in honor of the gods which are performed according to a definite pattern set and sanctified from olden times.

[776] Each deity may independently show, within his sphere of activity, grace or wrath toward man; for instance, he may send sickness or misfortune on him or his cattle, etc.
[787] The Abkhaz easily determine by special signs whether the
[688] deities' anger is the result of deviations from the fixed pattern of the religious rites. To avert the wrath of the gods caused by omissions in prayers and sacrifices, they must repeat the offerings and complete whatever was omitted the first time; uncorrected omissions and mistakes in ritual weigh heavily as guilt felt toward the angry gods, even upon generations
[755] far removed from the sinners. If anyone falls ill in conse-
[753] quence of neglect in ritual toward one or another god, he must offer him a sacrifice in order to recover. If he is

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[755] [782] [789] candles, she lets it float down the stream, saying, "Amuse yourself with this one, instead of the sick person." Finally the old praying-woman passes her hand over the sick person's back, raises him, and having given him liberty ("azati") from his ailment, she sends him home, instructing him not to look around on his way back. The food brought to the stream is eaten on the spot by the participants in the ceremony; the remains from the table are thrown into the water and the dishes washed clean.

This prayer-ritual is considered the most sacred of all in Abkhazia, and the name of the rainbow, Atsaqva, is pronounced with great reverence. The Abkhaz claims that as [821] a consequence of this ceremony in the rainbow's honor the rain appears.

4.

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[782] The Prayer-Ceremony in Honor of the Wind (Phsharnha)

A large loaf of bread with cheese is prepared, placed in a basket, and carried some distance from the house. Here [776] [821] a prayer is said to "Lady Wind" (a deity of female sex), in which she is asked to bring good and to carry off evil and to [777] deliver them from all sorts of misfortunes, etc. Then the middle part of the loaf is cut out, carried into the forest, and hung on an oak tree near the top. The next day, the one who first comes near the oak tree feasts on this offering.

5.

A Prayer in Honor of a Tree

[782] [824] On Assumption Day, vitushki are baked according to the number of men in the family; then the master of the house, with his household, approaches any kind of young tree and, putting his foot on it, prays, "Tree, give me your blessing and happiness ... that I may safely come down